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Homelessness in California

The State's Uncoordinated Approach to Addressing Homelessness Has Hampered the Effectiveness of Its Efforts

Background

With more than 151,000 Californians who experienced homelessness in 2019, California has the largest homeless population in the nation. Of these 151,000 homeless individuals, more than 100,000 were unsheltered—living on the streets, in parks, or in cars. The federal government created the Continuum of Care (CoC) program to address homelessness and provide funding to nonprofit providers and state and local governments to quickly rehouse individuals and families. This audit assessed the State's and CoCs' practices and efforts to address homelessness.

Key Recommendations

The Legislature should require the following:

- The homeless council should work with all state agencies that provide homelessness programs and funding to collect and track program funding data. It should also prioritize its statutory goals emphasizing the coordination of statewide efforts to combat homelessness, finalize its action plan, and regularly update the plan.
- State entities that administer state funding for homelessness should ensure that the recipient service providers capture relevant data in their respective CoCs homeless database.

Local governments should coordinate with their CoCs to:

- Assure the levels of services and service providers are adequate to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness by annually conducting a comprehensive gaps analyses.
- Implement, by August 2021, a planning process and develop a comprehensive plan, assess the possibility of implementing a dedicated hotline for providing information about available services, and identify projects that offer the greatest benefits when ranking applications for funding.

Key Findings

- The State's approach to combating homelessness is fragmented—it provided homeless services through at least nine state agencies that administer 41 different programs.
- Established in 2017 to identify homelessness resources, benefits, and services, the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (homeless council) has not met some of its most critical goals.
 - » It does not track how the State spends funds to combat homelessness and has not coordinated existing state and federal funding.
 - » It lacks complete data and cannot assess how effectively the State responds to homelessness—most CoCs do not collect data from all service providers on services they provide or who they serve.
 - » It has not provided CoCs with support and guidance to effectively address homelessness.
- The CoCs we reviewed do not consistently comply with regulations or implement best practices related to identifying, planning for, and providing services to those experiencing homelessness.
 - » None conducts a comprehensive annual gaps analysis to determine if the amount and type of services provided in their areas are adequate to achieve the goal of reducing homelessness.
 - » Some do not have comprehensive plans with strategies to address homelessness, some still manually conduct counts and record data, and some lack a dedicated hotline for assisting the homeless.

The Majority of Californians Experiencing Homelessness Are Unsheltered and Make Up Over Half of Those Unsheltered in the Nation

